

Book Review

Bryony Onciul, Michelle L. Stefano and Stephanie Hawke (eds), *Engaging Heritage, Engaging Communities*, Woodbridge: Boydell Press, 2017, hardback £60.00/ebook £19.99, pp. ix+246.

The latest edition in the Heritage Matters series published by the International Centre for Cultural and Heritage Studies (ICCHS) at Newcastle University, this volume assembles international perspectives on the ways various stakeholders are involved (or not) in the management, conservation and interpretation of heritage. As community engagement has become central to museological discourse in recent years, this book offers a significant contribution to this ever-evolving and complex concept by critically examining some of the key debates and different practices concerning collaboration between communities and their cultural heritage. The seventeen chapters, representing a diversity of communities and forms of heritage, are organized into three sections—Engaging Concepts, Engaging Creatively and Engaging Challenges. Each section includes chapters that are largely theoretical, chapters that focus primarily on specific projects and chapters that consist of interviews with heritage scholars and practitioners from around the world. Among these, the most cogent are the authors who clearly define the communities under consideration and discuss their participation in different forms of heritage in concrete terms. Some of these bring a timely transcultural perspective to the discussion about community engagement, which is arguably one of the book's greatest strengths.

Tully (Chapter 7) shows the positive outcome of involving participants from a diverse range of ages, cultures and disciplinary backgrounds in the *Re-Imagining Egypt* exhibit, which was on display from November 2013 through February 2014 at the Saffron Walden Museum in the UK. Workshops with local school children and an artist-in-residence from Egypt enabled archaeologists and curators to expand their interpretations of Egyptian artefacts to include modern perspectives and multiple voices in a collaborative curatorial process. Stefano and King's (Chapter 10) analysis of two projects in the US related to deindustrialization - Mapping Baybrook and Mill Stories - centralizes individual living experiences of industrial decline in two Baltimore neighbourhoods and explores the liminal space between public and private discourse about development and communities. Their focus on oral histories and their place-based research methodology present a refreshing particularity to an often-generalized 'heritagescape' (134) and illustrates the impact that cultural heritage can have on people's sense of self and place. Likewise, Sikora (Chapter 12) examines two case studies of historic battlefields in the UK - Flodden and Culloden - and reveals the ambiguity in preserving and interpreting these spaces without clearly delineated parameters. He focuses on potential rifts in community engagement through contrasting analyses of Flodden Field, which was developed as a cultural heritage destination without involving all stakeholders, and Culloden, which has provoked local concern because it is not being conserved. Such ambiguous heritage settings as historic battlefields or former industrial sites that have been redeveloped offer alternative models of community engagement and pose new challenges.

Some of the essays decentre community engagement from a primarily Western perspective. For example, Schorch (Chapter 2) addresses the 'transpacific entanglement of histories, cultures and economies' (31) in the South Pacific region by approaching communities as 'assemblages' and using hermeneutics to examine people's engagement with heritage 'as lived and interpreted phenomena' (33). Through his exploration of indigenous curatorial

practices at the Bernice Pauahi Bishop Museum in Hawai'i and the interpretation of Māori *taonga* (treasures) in the Cook/Forster collection at Georg-August-University Göttingen in Germany, Schorch shows how communities and heritage objects are dynamic and mutually constitutive networks. Along a similar vein, Lythberg, Hogsden and Ngata (Chapter 16) discuss two separate but related projects that create a 'digital contact network' (209) between a Māori tribal community in Aotearoa-New Zealand and the University of Cambridge's Museum of Archaeology and Anthropology. The network created through this collaboration addresses the inherent asymmetries to 'contact zones' as identified by Clifford (1997) in his seminal essay. Although the concept of contact zones has been criticized as being overused (Message 2009) and neo-colonial in nature (Boast 2011), its relevance to cross-cultural encounters through heritage objects continues to resonate and Lythberg, Hogsden and Ngata show how virtual contact zones can provide more equal exchanges and create new forms of knowledge.

The overall merits of the book are somewhat diminished by errors such as citations within the text that do not have corresponding references in the bibliography. The first chapter over-relies on long quotations, which are off-putting, especially at the beginning of the book. Furthermore, some illustrations could have been more effective. For example, the title page featured a photograph of dancers bending their swords together in a Rapper Dance performance, but without a caption it was an indecipherable image for anyone unfamiliar with this particular tradition. The photograph was repeated later in Chapter 13 in the essay about this performance, but even with the caption present, it was not the most effective image in that it presented the backsides of two men, thereby obscuring most of the action of the dance. Stefano's analysis of this centuries-old sword dancing tradition from Northeast England as a 'naturally-occurring ecomuseum' (161) demonstrates the conflicts between preservation of cultural heritage and the organic processes through which it continues to evolve. A more compelling photograph that better visualizes what the author describes would have enhanced the important issues this chapter considers.

Interviews with heritage professionals interspersed between the chapters provide specific narratives through individual accounts of varied experiences in the field. Although the roles and institutional affiliations of the interviewees are revealed through the course of the conversation, brief introductory contextual information would have been helpful. As the ICCHS Heritage Matters series purports to address a wide audience in various types of museums, galleries and heritage organizations, not all readers will be familiar with every person interviewed in this book. Presumably the editors posed the questions and conducted the interviews, but the identity of the interviewer would have made these chapters read more as the conversations one can assume they were intended to convey.

Overall, the diversity of perspectives and specificity of heritage settings assembled in this volume provide a depth and breadth of issues relevant to the contemporary fields of museum studies and heritage management. Anyone who considers the importance of communities to the conservation, interpretation and dynamic experiences of heritage would benefit from the research and critiques in this book. Interviews with various heritage scholars and professionals lend a conversational tone and offer a first-hand account of heritage practices to augment the theories elaborated in the chapters. The need for meaningful engagement between people and their shared heritage is more important than ever as cultural heritage is increasingly threatened all over the world and communities splinter along political affiliations, race and class. Although 'museums do not own heritage' (49), museum and heritage professionals can play an essential role in facilitating people's active involvement in their cultural heritage, and this book suggests models for doing so while critically examining assumptions about community engagement and identifying areas of future development for these concerns.

Kristina Dziedzic Wright

Seoul National University, ROK
School of Museum Studies, University of Leicester, UK

References

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- Message, K. (2009) 'Museum studies: borderwork, genealogy, revolution', *Museum and Society* 7 (2) 125-132.